

An Exploratory Study of the Needs of Todd County Families

Applied Social Work Research

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Abstract

The research study conducted analyzed needs assessments from the Todd County Youth Services Center to examine needs of Todd County families. The study consisted of six variables of which included demographic information, childcare service needs, basic care needs, health and mental health needs, and parent support needs. Out of these variables, only certain variables were analyzed to show the increased need for services. Results of the study showed evidence that Todd County is in need of assistance in all areas assessed, except for childcare service support (showing only 2 in need out of 25). Out of 200 assessments, only 25 were analyzed to show quick data on the needs in the county. Having this baseline data showing increased needs in Todd County, encouraged the researcher to continue running statistical tests in the future for the purposes of having research-based data of needs to present to important key stakeholders within the school and community. Acknowledging that more programming is needed by showing evidence may help to prove to others that families struggle in the county.

The research study also provided results that the basic needs variable was high in validity and reliability to prove effectiveness of the assessment in this key area. Having this knowledge will help the researcher to continue using the assessments to better serve the Youth Services Center and Todd County students and families.

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Introduction

Problem Statement

Looking at the overall needs of Todd County, Kentucky was explored by gathering research data to show the increased needs of members in this particular rural community. Todd County, Kentucky is a rural county consisting of approximately 12,000 in 2004 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Keeping this in mind, the needs of the community appear to outweigh the number of individuals living in the county as shown by research statistics gathered by the needs assessments from the Todd County Youth Services Center in 2005. Some of the needs within the county have already been evaluated by agencies such as the U.S. Department of Commerce, Kentucky Youth Advocates, Inc, Kentucky Kids Count, Delta Access Project and the U.S. Census Bureau.

According to Kids Count data (2004), the dropout rate for teens in high school was at an 8% trend, compared to a 2.99% dropout rate for Todd County Central High School students (Kentucky Department of Education, 2004). Kids Count data (2004) also showed that 33% of children in the state of Kentucky, have parents who are unemployed year around, as compared to the unemployment rate of Todd County being 5.3% in 2004 (Kentucky Youth Advocates, 2006). Showing the need for prenatal care and development using Kids Count data (2004), 23% under the age of 18 gave birth as compared to Todd County's average of 16.7% teen births in 2005 (Kentucky Delta Access Project, 2005).

Exploring the needs in the Todd County community only shows evidence that more programming, activities and interventions are needed, in the county, to make adequate change. Having 49.7% of children receiving free and reduced lunch in the state (Kentucky

Youth Advocates, 2005) and approximately 55% of children from Todd County receiving free and reduced lunch (Kentucky Kids Count, 2005) proves that low income families are in need of support. Personal income for Todd County residents was at \$20,870 in 2003, which was below state average of \$26,575 and U.S. average of \$31,472 in 2003 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006).

Medically, 35% of the population in Todd County are at risk of diabetes (Kentucky Delta Access Project, 2005). However, there are only a few health care facilities that provide adequate care for those in need of medical services (Kentucky Delta Access Project, 2005). Treatment facilities for alcohol and/or other drugs as well as mental health are not readily available in the county. The majority of the families, especially those without a medical card, have to travel 20-30 miles to obtain proper services (Kentucky Delta Access Project, 2005).

In order for social work practitioners to fully understand the prevalence of needs within an area, a needs assessment is the best tool to use to attain such data. Using the Youth Services Center needs assessments (2005), needs were specified within the outcomes of the data, which will be presented further on in this research project. Background information about Youth Services Centers is important for the purposes of understanding the means of conducting needs assessments annually.

The Family Resource and Youth Services Centers began in 1990 and evolved from the KERA (Kentucky Education Reform Act) to provide support and local solutions for non-academic barriers to students and their families (Denton, 2006). The eligibility criteria for a school to have a Family Resource and Youth Services Center lie in the number/percentage of free and reduced lunch of students at a particular school. The school must be at least 20%

free and reduced lunch in order to have a Family Resource and/or Youth Services Center (Denton, 2006). The Family Resource Centers are particularly in charge of K-5 grades and the Youth Services Centers typically serve 6-12 grades. Meeting state mandated components helps to guide the coordinators of the centers, keeping the agency on task. (Denton, 2006). By administering needs assessments, this is a more efficient way to determine needs for specific programming to remove non-academic barriers for students. Having the data from the assessments will help to identify gaps in learning as well as in other equally important areas.

Methods

The research design utilized in this exploratory study was a cross-sectional survey, using a needs assessment gathering qualitative measurements. The focus of the needs assessment was to gather data from Todd County families, particularly parents of students, about their specific needs. This instrument included five different sections, which asked a variety of questions pertaining to direct service needs for the families in Todd County. The sections were used as the variables in the study of the needs of Todd County families, of which included demographic information, childcare service needs, basic care needs, health and mental health needs, and parent support needs. The specific needs measured included the number of children in the household as compared to those receiving KTAP (Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program) and/or free and reduced lunch. Other needs measured included the need for childcare service provision and assistance with clothing, food, housing, financial assistance, school supply needs, and holiday assistance. Two of the variables, of which include mental health/health needs and parental support needs, were singled out by scoring the scales by the number of yes' answered. This was another way to attain a different

set and more comparable set of results. The dependent variables in this study consisted of the needs of Todd County families. The independent variables were the families themselves, history and background of families as well as ability to define his or her needs.

With this study being an exploratory examination of the needs of Todd County families, a non-probability, purposive sampling method was utilized. Therefore, random sampling was instituted to ensure that there was a sample size that was somewhat a true representation of the population assessed. The secondary data gathered was used prior to conducting an exploratory study of the overall needs of the families involved. However, the needs assessments were administered to families at the beginning of the 2005 school year through a program called Leap Start (a transiting program for middle school-aged youth entering 6th grade) and were kept for confidential records by the Youth Services Center (Personal Communication, 2006).

By using secondary data for analyzing research conducted in the 2005 school year, informed consent was not needed to complete this particular project. Out of the approximately 200 surveys, only 25 were chosen in a random order to analyze. These were chosen by having another colleague pick at random within the stack of 200, choosing every third assessment up to 25. Considering the needs of the project, only a small sample was chosen in order to obtain quick data, to show needs of Todd County families, considering the short time span. The answers to the assessment included yes and no questions mostly, but also included the option of checking answers as they applied to each family. Coding these into numbers to run statistical tests on a research system called SPSS, helped to better understand the effectiveness of the assessment as well as the overall needs in the county.

After analyzing the data in the SPSS system, the researcher found that there were no more than four missing answers in each variable assessed. Using Pearson's Test, descriptive tests and frequencies tables were designed, as well as reliability and validity scales and graphs to show needs. The mean, median, mode, standard deviation, variance, range, minimum and maximum were included in the statistical tests to show outcomes. These results were then computed and analyzed by the researcher to answer the research question of, what are the needs of Todd County families.

Results

Research Question

The research question explored wanted to know the needs of Todd County families. The results detailing these needs are outlined in this section, showing a variety of data scales. Interpreting the demographic section of the research data, using frequency tables, showed that there were children between 0-3 (n=23, 2 missing) who lived in the families of the 25 assessed who received KTAP services (n=21, 4 missing) as well as free and reduced lunch (n=24, 1 missing). Childcare needs resulted in families not in need of childcare services (n=2, 23 missing) because 23 out of the 25 families already received childcare subsidies, according to the results. Those families in need of basic assistance to include clothing (n=23, 2 missing), food (n=23, 2 missing), housing (n=22, 3 missing), financial assistance (n=23, 2 missing), school supplies (n=22, 3 missing) and holiday assistance (n=23, 2 missing) showed evidence that a need for basic, everyday assistance was needed in the 25 families assessed. Needs for health and mental health assistance (n=24, 1 missing) and support for parents needing assistance (n=23, 2 missing) also showed an increased need for other service provision.

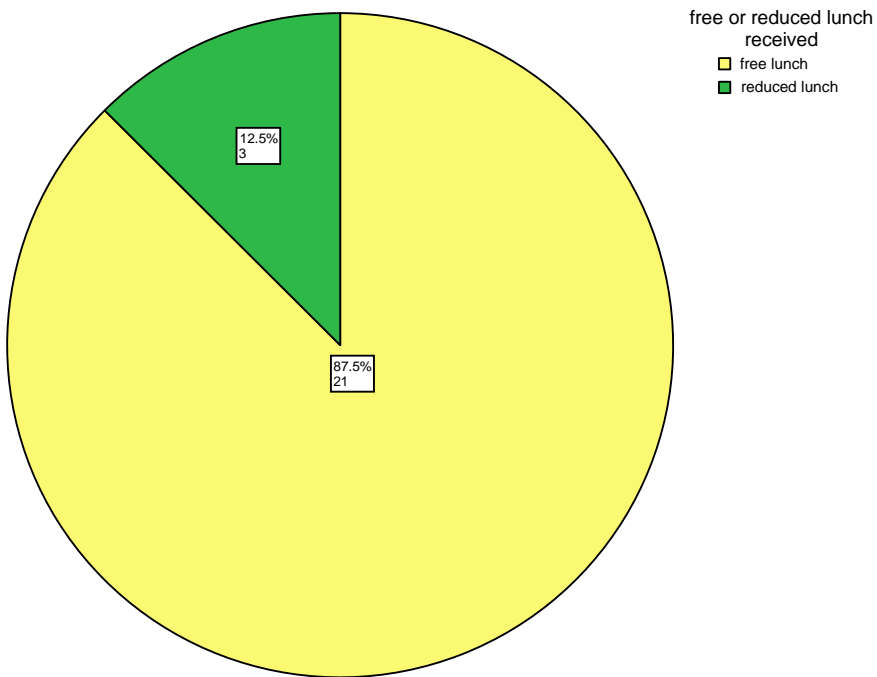
Results from correlating data showed that there was a high correlation (84%) between children in the home from 0-3 years and children who receive KTAP services. However, using Pearson's Test with a two tailed hypothesis/significance data confirmed that there was a non-significant, negative correlation between the need for health/mental health assistance and support for parents needing assistance ($n = -.070$). A non-significant positive correlation was gathered between number of children in the home and the need for health/mental health services ($n = .012$).

Assessing for reliability scores using the section for basic needs, which included clothing, food, housing, financial assistance, holiday assistance, and school supply assistance, the Cronbach's Alpha test was utilized. This scale was used in testing the reliability and validity of the assessment and proved to have a validity of 88%, which computes to having a high validity and reliability rating out of the six questions.

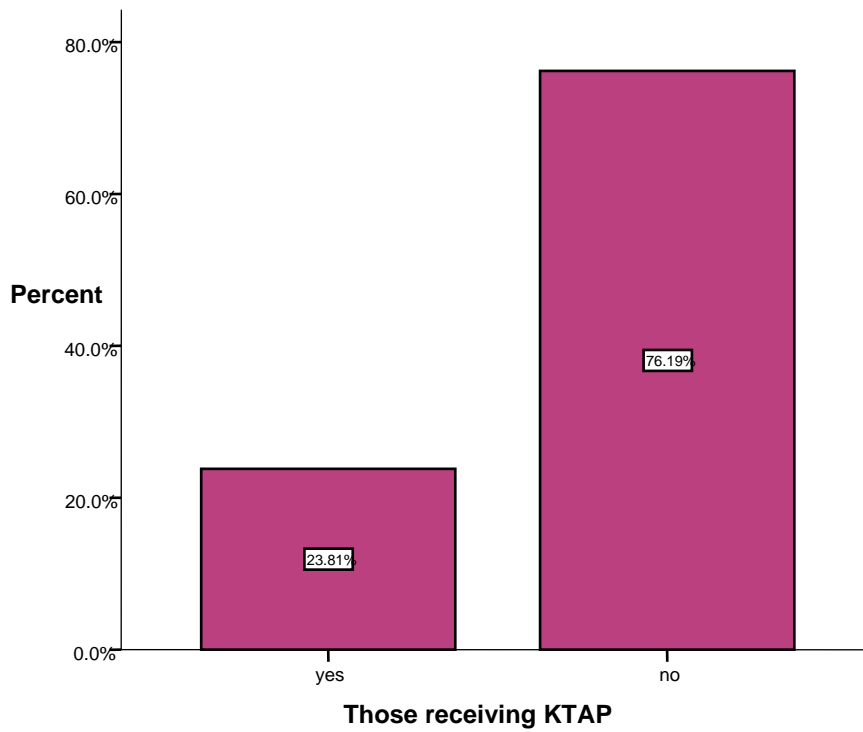
Results also evidenced that more students received free lunches ($n=21$) than reduced lunches ($n=3$) showing a need for food assistance within the county. The majority (56%) of the families assessed have a medical card that can be used for treatment services and medications that may be needed. However, this concludes that out of the 25 families assessed, 8.7% of them have no insurance to help financially support medical needs.

A few of the graphs to show needs of Todd County families are detailed below. The first graph is a pie chart using percentages of students who receive free and reduced lunch. Out of the 25 surveys, 87.5% receive free lunch while 12.5% receive a reduced lunch. The final graph uses a bar graph to detail that 23.81% of families receive KTAP services and 76.19% do not receive KTAP assistance, meaning that further assistance was needed in this area.

Free or Reduced Lunch for Todd County Families (out of 25 surveys)



Todd County Families Who Receive KTAP (out of 25 surveys)



Discussion

The purpose of exploring the needs of Todd County families using the Youth Services Center needs assessments was to determine future programming and activity needs for students and their families. Having the knowledge of what families need versus what sounds logical is quite different when wanting to appropriately design an effective strategy for intervention. As shown in the results of the assessment, the bigger needs lie within KTAP, food, clothing, housing, financial assistance, holiday assistance, school supply assistance, health/mental health assistance and support for parents. These are just some of the needs of Todd County families and were the only ones assessed in this particular survey.

Evidenced-based practice in social work practice appears to be vitally important. Having a clear grasp on the needs of Todd County families benefits all involved. The reliability and validity of the basic need scale (ex. Clothing, food, school supplies, etc...) was statistically high in both areas ($s=.87$). This employs that this particular scale was useful in determining overall need in basic life areas. By not having any statistically significant categories, caused the scales to have limitations; but the overall focus was to explore individual needs of families. Other limitations in this study included the fact that there was not a true representation of the population. By using only 25 assessments out of 200, only presented evidence that approximately 12% of families were surveyed. If more family needs assessments were analyzed, more needs would have been determined according to numbers given from the 25 utilized.

Findings from previous studies (detailed in the introduction section) found that Todd County Kentucky has been in need of additional services for quite some time. The increase in low-income families as well as the increased poverty level and unemployment rates

showed relevant data that more programming and assistance would be effective and greatly appreciated by the community. As mentioned in the results section, the Pearson's test concluded that there was a high correlation (84%) between children in the home from 0-3 years and children who received KTAP services. This test also confirmed that there was a non-significant, negative correlation between the need for health/mental health assistance and support for parents needing assistance ($n = -.070$). A non-significant positive correlation was gathered between number of children in the home and the need for health/mental health services ($n = .012$) using this test as well.

Examining this study in an exploratory nature showed no significant or causal relationships between variables, or used hypothesis testing to compare rejection levels. Acknowledging and determining needs of Todd County families was the purpose and goal for this research. Since the needs were determined and showed a high significance in overall needs, proper programming and community planning would need to be coordinated to assist these families. Future research may be conducted to show needs from year to year to determine new and updated programming efforts. The Youth Services Center needs assessments are conducted annually for the purpose of grant funds and determination of program planning. When used in this manner, research becomes a part of the daily functioning of the coordinator and staff of the Youth Services Center and is a requirement for this organization by the state of Kentucky.

Conclusion

This study benefits those who work with families in Todd County as well as with other communities by helping individuals, organizations or groups to look more closely at the needs and to analyze them to increase support and show evidence of needs. This study was

beneficial to the researcher because the researcher serves as an employee of the Youth Services Center and can use the research in future plans, to progress. Combining this study with others has been instrumental in showing that in this rural community, needs are widespread. Implementing effective and appropriate services, while being culturally sensitive to the population, could be a difficult but manageable task.

Creating this study not only gave researched-based facts on the needs of Todd County families but also gave ideas for future studies. Examining dropout rates of high school-age youth and/or retention rates among teens, correlating data using those with high school diplomas versus those with a GED and researching specific programs already instituted to show effectiveness, are other ideas that the researcher has explored.

In conclusion, not only did this research study set the stage for future studies but it also showed a great need for Todd County families as well as the lack of services available. Other counties surrounding Todd County may also be in a crisis as well and this study may help them to explore their needs more in depth. Having consistent, reliable and available services in Todd County will benefit these families. In this rural community, these services are often unavailable or difficult to find. However, by showing evidence of the needs, this study may give grant funders' and local community stakeholders reasons for turning the Todd County culture and service system into a thriving and supportive environment for families and community members residing in the county.

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